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In Memoriam Professor Matthew H. Kaufman 1942-2013

Professor Emeritus of Anatomy, University of Edinburgh
Honorary Librarian and Former President of Royal Medical Society

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The chief anaesthetist compelled relaxation as we had our initial talk in the hour or so before my minor operation at the Western General, Edinburgh, on Friday 16 August. It was natural to ask what I would have been doing if I wasn't there.

'I would be at the funeral of my friend Matt Kaufman,' I said, 'my colleague the former Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh.'

Suddenly it was he who needed comfort, and badly. He hadn't known of Matt's death, or even of his hospitalization there after his stroke a few weeks earlier. But Dr Matthew Royds had been one of his devoted students, and his collaborator in published work arising from his study under Matt's direction. Postoperatively I found 'The Penman Case- a Re-evaluation'. Journal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (February 2000)- Matt was of course FRCS, FRCP and FRSE as well as Ph.D. and D.Sc. and Professor of Anatomy in Edinburgh, his original Alma Mater before graduate research, lectureship in Anatomy, King's College Fellowship and Directorship of Studies at Cambridge from 1970-1985 when he was called to the 300-year-old Chair of Anatomy at Edinburgh (the oldest in these islands but 200 years younger than the School itself- Matt would write his Chair's History.

'The Penman Case' was characteristic Matt: zealous pursuit of new insights and publication for his student, turning on a giant of Edinburgh's medical history- in this case the microsurgeon James Syme (1799-1870).

Matt Kaufman was trained as a doctor and medical embryological researcher and teacher: he was a self-trained historian

learning the discipline in his fifties, although his son David would qualify as a professional historian now teaching in our School of History. But father and son respected historians' ethical obligations. Matt disliked James Syme above all for his part in destroying the Regius Chair of Military Surgery after the death of Sir George Ballingall in 1855 having held the Professorship for thirty years, recounted so impressively in Matt's substantial book The Regius Chair in Military Surgery at the University of Edinburgh (2003, in the Wellcome series in the History of Medicine) and he exposed Syme's letters lobbying cabinet ministers to prevent any replacement of Ballingall. Matt's anger at the fate of that Chair wasn't unconnected with what he saw as danger for the survival of his own Chair when he was due to retire, Anatomy having become academically unfashionable. But its time has returned, in part certainly due to Matt's tireless campaigning for the subject in print, in discussion, in research and in teaching (he was invaluable to history students whom I made consult him on battle wounds and their treatment in the American Civil War era). Edinburgh now has two Professors of Anatomy and a separate Head of Department in Matt's place. As to Syme, Matt gave him a fair hearing and due honour when research findings so dictated as they did in 'The Penman Case'. The 29-year-old Syme was asked by Ballingall to look at an enormous tumour and operated on it (these were pre-anaesthetic days, as Matt Kaufman and Matt Royds stressed). The great Joseph Lister inspected the patient 27 years later, finding him bearded but otherwise in perfect health ever since Syme's cut.

James Syme gazes coldly on us from several of Matt's historical studies, the expression curiously akin to the late Ian Richardson playing the murderous Tory Chief Whip in

the TV serial drama House of Cards ('but you cannot possibly expect me to comment'). Understandably Matt sought to rescue other surgeons from oblivion covered by Syme's successes, much the best way to question a reputation. His other joint paper with Matt Royds was 'Excision of a remarkable tumour in the upper jaw in 1834 by Robert Liston' (1794-1847) one of Liston's very last Edinburgh operations before taking an appointment in what would become University College London, Syme having gained the Professorship of Surgery at Edinburgh Liston had sought. Matt Kaufman and Matt Royds, here as elsewhere, proceeded from Matt Kaufman's work in resurrecting anatomic museum plaster-of-Paris pre-operative casts of the patient. Here again Matt Kaufman was an intransigent but lonely fighter as University bureaucrats with or without medical qualifications brayed indifference to the importance of such assets. In the case of some of the most famous treasures, such as the skeleton on murderer William Burke (1792-1829), holders of the Chair of Anatomy were actually designated owners of murderers' corpses by judges in passing capital sentences, the bodies to become the property of the next professors, in due succession, but some recent legal jiggery-pokery seemed for a time to set this aside. The written records and other patient person-alia amplified various cases, Liston's successful removal of the patient's return to have a gold palate fitted, his voice having returned at length.

Matt followed up Liston to produce a biographical and medical study, Robert Liston: Surgery's Hero (2009), a work far more austere than its title, in which Matt showed that the incumbent in Edinburgh's Chair of Surgery, Russell, demanded a pension from his successor before

consenting to retire and name his replacement: Liston refused, having little money of his own quite apart from his doubts about the academic integrity of such a bargain (he came from a long line of Church of Scotland ministers) and his distant cousin, Syme, whom he had started in extra-mural teaching as an undergraduate of 19, now produced the money and took the Chair. The friendship of Liston and Syme had been close, and their break correspondingly bitter. Liston was the more outspoken- he was barred for five years from the Royal Infirmary for the violence of his language about colleagues, who included Robert Knox, later of Burke and Hare celebrity, a tougher nut than Liston when it came to defamation of rivals in anatomy classes. Matt Kaufman, by frankness as to his hero's excesses, opened up wells of realistic sympathy, all the more by printing without comment Liston's letter asking for reconciliation in 1838, with magnanimity but with dignity:

...for myself, I can say that I have no angry feelings towards you, and you ought not to have any hostile feelings towards me. I have long thought of having our differences adjusted, and I trust you will not throw any obstacle in the way. ...Will you allow me to send you a copy of my last book? Write and tell me that you wish to have our grievances and sores not plastered up, but firmly cicatrized; there is a surgical figure for you. Believe me, yours faithfully,
Robert Liston

I am not so bad as you believe me to be.

That was the hard man talking, the leader of gangs of resurrections into graveyards in his time.

Like many another historian on other tasks however remote, Matt had to thole the frustration of any answer from Syme having vanished almost certainly for good, but either then or later the cousins returned to their old friendship, for when Liston went back to Edinburgh for several days, he stayed with Syme. As Liston's biographer Matt brought expertise to what is normally in very unskilled hands: the subject's death. Matt's charming, flickering elfin smile would have enjoyed 'subject' having more meanings than the usual, even if the twentieth century for all its conceit could not supply him with the material data of post-mortem on a hero dead for more than 150 years. But he faithfully looked into the written records showing preliminary diagnosis of what would prove Liston's mortal illnesses, then the mistaken subsequent and very different conclusions, finally what was discovered then the great surgeon died aged 53.

Yet Matt's readiness to look at great figures obscured by more popular rivals had to take into account Liston's victims as well as Syme's. It was Matt who gave biographical recognition to the once famous but forgotten Barclay whom Liston first served and then rejected to set up on his own (with the fledgling Syme): Dr John Barclay (1758-1826): extra-mural teacher of human and comparative anatomy in Edinburgh (2007). Again, posterity's indifference or ridicule for supposedly discredited or at least now unfashionable medical preoccupations, sneered its mentions of phrenology, but it was Matt who saw that the lifelong passions of many very intelligent scientists had still much to teach.

His Edinburgh Phrenological Society: a History (2005) would not vindicate what George Combe (1788-1858) and his fellow Phrenologists convinced themselves could be read from study of skulls. Yet apart from his own work in discovering reclassifying and preserving Edinburgh's longdead medic's collection of human skulls from all over the world (imperialism certainly cosmopolitized medical research), Matt showed how much more was to be discovered by studying what the phrenologists did and wrote and finding what important discoveries they made even if they were mistaken in their intellectual Eldorado, the quest-object they worshipped so passionately. There was again a somewhat autobiographical cast to this. Matt's hundreds of articles and essays, and even more his mighty books, are anything but mistaken in their targets, but on the way he produced invaluable new discoveries in all directions (such as proof of the large volume of Irish Roman Catholics who defeated Government attempts to keep them illiterate by winning (unrivalled) Scottish medical qualifications).

And he kept his head and his human respect while taking account of the venom of medical infighting led by the highly scurrilous Lancet now an honoured name but then vitriolic enough in its vendetta to send Private Eye screaming for its mother. Matt was quietly firm in rejecting attempts to deny the realities of this but would give credit for positive achievement (where there was any) to even the worst character assassins. Again, bitter personal experience armed him for diagnosis of historical realities. Even the modern university obsessions with rationing of space (frequently beyond all rational justification) equipped Matt to discover historical

antecedents in medical turf wars in Old College itself.

And for all the implacable fidelity with which Matt brought medical pastmasters and pests to life in his historical works, the kept medicine and its concerns at the heart of his work. For instance The Regius Chair of Military Surgery was offset by another major work from Matt in the same year, 2003, Musket-ball and Sabre Injuries from the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Both were illustrated with such apposite reproductions that a first-class exhibition could have been set up through their aid alone. Love of the past of its own sake shone through it all whether in his writing, in his conversation, or in his teaching (I had the honour of joint teaching one class with him, on the Burke and Hare front, where he himself produced several remarkable monographs modifying some of our earlier conclusions).

I loved Matt, and I shall awake to his loss all the more as I involuntarily look around for him at Royal Medical Society gatherings, for his devoted study of our centuries of student treatises gave him RMS as his last professional home. But it had been a first professional home as well, since as participant and President in the 1960s he had made his individual mark. Pat Strong, the self-styled Dragon who ruled the RMS as Archivist in name and Queen, Empress and God in reality, invariably spoke of Matt's many honours was the memory of Pat's applause. But neither History nor the RMS, (refreshing devotions though each of them are) can tell anything like the full story of Matt Kaufman's greatness. We have to turn to his initial research achievements once graduated from Edinburgh and the RMS, when he decided against becoming a doctor and became a recruit at our Animal Genetics unit still under the gigantic inspiration of

Conrad Hal Waddington (1905-75), and after that in Cambridge started investigations of parthanogenesis in the mouse. Matt had been born in Hackney Hospital, London, in 1942. Hitler was raining death from the skies while Matt was being conceived, and killing Matt's fellow-Jews in their thousands in the lands he controlled: on its side the fight to maintain civilian morale was being led by the Jews of Stepney and Shoreditch. The Jews of London affirmed life, as he would show in his Early Mammalian Development-Parthanogenetic Studies (1983), and the 28 papers whose publication over the previous decade reflected instructive side issues as well as basics to the book. Matt's work with (when at Cambridge) with the future Nobel Prizewinner Martin Evans would have included him in the honour had he stayed with it instead of taking his expertise to Israel and then to Edinburgh, so great was his part in determining the methodology for (first-time) establishment of pluripotent stem cells in tissue culture now known as Embryonic Stem (ES) but initially was Evans-Kaufman.

The obvious assertion of his findings and hypotheses in book form eventuated (via his usual forst of articles) in his Atlas of Mouse Development (1992) followed in 1999 by his and Jonathan Bard's Anatomical Basis of Mouse Development, which with characteristic Kaufman mingling of humour and perfectionism he announced originated 'in an attempt to make an index for Atlas of Mouse Development'.

Indexes of books usually proclaim that the life-blood of what they enumerate has finally run dry: Matt must be one of the very few scholars who turned his index into the basis of freshly scholarly life, a parthanogenesis in itself if ever there was one. Jonathan Bard thought of Matt as an exceptionally skillful

embryologist able to dissect, culture and manipulate mouse embryo at the earliest stages. Ironically Syme's peerless microsurgery had its counterpart in his future critic: we have to think of the scientist at practical work unrivalled in the confidence and near-infallibility with which his hands would move among the smallest organisms.

But even in this purely scientific period of his professional life, the mastery of time which Matt's engagement with medical history would produce, cast its shadow in advance. Matt could foresee the possible fate of his own scholarship in the twenty-first century while still living in the twentieth.

Anatomical Basis of Mouse Development warned with Matt's usual conscientiousness, courage, realism and laughter:

... work in progress will render parts of the lineage information out of date far sooner than we would like.

... we have probably underestimated the sophistication of some of the interaction between tissues, and future research will certainly demonstrate sins of omission, but not, we hope, too many of those of commission.

Owen Dudley Edwards